



H.M.S. Pinafore

By Gilbert and Sullivan

Curriculum Guide

***H.M.S. Pinafore* Curriculum**

This *H.M.S. Pinafore* curriculum is designed to give students as much hands-on and interactive activity as possible. The curriculum includes classroom activities (both group and individual), research topics which can be worked on in groups or individually (with information presented orally or written), writing assignments, pre-show discussion questions, post-show discussion questions, and vocabulary lists.

The curriculum attempts to expose the student to the history of musical theatre, background material on Gilbert and Sullivan, historical and social implications of the Victorian era, and literary qualities of this musical play. Students can explore themes, characters, music, and drama while using their curiosity, creativity, writing skills, and analytical and critical judgement skills.

We advise that you read through the entire curriculum before beginning. Some activities overlap and complement each other. We have tried to leave it up to teachers to pull various activities and to change, adapt and combine them to meet the needs of their students. It is not expected that all the activities from the curriculum will be covered by any group. One class may spend two weeks on the study of Gilbert and Sullivan and *H.M.S. Pinafore*, while another might spend two days. This will depend upon the preferences and needs of various teachers. The curriculum is intended, however, to be a helpful guide to support the creativity and methodology of each individual teacher. We hope that you will share some of your activities and methodology with us.

Much of the biographical, social, artistic, and thematic information contained in the curriculum points towards questions in the research and discussion sections. More biographical, historical, artistic and literary information is contained in the Huntington's *H.M.S. Pinafore* Study Guide. The Guide also includes character descriptions and a synopsis of the play.

Have fun!

Note: Please fill out the enclosed evaluation form when you have completed teaching *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and send it to Pamela Hill, Director of Education, Huntington Theatre Company, 264 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115. We will use your input to make adjustments to our curricula as the season continues with subsequent plays.

Introduction

Librettist William Schwenck Gilbert (1836 - 1911) and composer Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842 - 1900) wrote a series of comic operas as a team from 1875 through 1896.

The Gilbert and Sullivan operettas generally have humorous plots and a rare combination of good-natured satire, lilting melody, and brilliant parody. Through exaggeration, they poke fun at character and social foibles, as well as at hackneyed musical conventions. They have traditionally been performed in a highly stylized manner based directly on the original productions at the Savoy Theatre in London, produced by Richard D'Oyly Carte, the manager who first conceived of a Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration.

The first Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration was the one-act "Thespis," a Christmas play written as a curtain opener, performed on December 26, 1871. The one-act "Trial by Jury" was the first deliberately planned collaboration; this was followed by *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Patience*, *Iolanthe*, *Princess Ida*, *The Mikado*, *Ruddigore*, *The Yeoman of the Guard*, *The Gondoliers*, *Utopia (Limited)*, and *The Grand Duke*.

These works were enormously successful in their day and remain popular throughout the English-speaking world.

For more information on Gilbert and Sullivan and the times surrounding their works, see the Study Guide.

Discussion Questions for before viewing or reading *H.M.S. Pinafore*

Please note : Many of these questions may be further discussed after reading or viewing the play.

1. Discuss comedy vs. satire. Which is more successful as a means of social comment, and why? Consider some examples of contemporary satire. Discuss the elements that make it satire. (There might be a follow-up discussion on this topic after reading or viewing *H.M.S. Pinafore*.)

2. Define some of the literary archetypes found in *Pinafore*: the changeling hero, the king/prince in disguise wooing a king's daughter, star-crossed lovers in conflict with parents. Where else in literature do we find these types? (Continue this discussion after reading or viewing *Pinafore*.)

3. Discuss the authority held by the 19th century ship's captain (You may wish to refer to such works as *Billy Budd*, *Moby Dick*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*). Follow up with a comparison to the presentation of naval officers and their authority in *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

4. What effect does music have on you? How does music effect mood? Discuss some specific examples.

5. The supremacy of words over lyrics and vice-versa was a central conflict for Gilbert and Sullivan. They often argued over which came first, lyrics or music. Which do you think comes first, lyrics or music? What makes you think so? Examine some music you listen to. How does the music complement the lyrics, and vice versa? Follow up this question with a discussion of *H.M.S Pinafore*'s lyrics and music. (In general, Gilbert wrote the lyrics first in Gilbert and Sullivan collaborations, but he sometimes rewrote them later to fit the music Sullivan was trying to create.)

6. What is an operetta? Define the following terms: recitative, madrigal, ballad, chorus, aria, song, barcarole, duet, quartette, octet.

7. Much has been written about Sullivan's habit of writing his scores rapidly under great pressure in the weeks immediately before a show's premiere production. Describe any people you know who work this way. Perhaps, you, yourself, work this way. Describe some pressure situations you've worked under. Do you believe that pressure spawns creativity? Discuss the psychology behind this idea.

8. Gilbert was strict when it came to the interpretation and rehearsal of his work. He was blunt and crusty; however, many people suspected these qualities hid an inner kindness. The limitless patience and effort he asked of his players he was willing to give himself. Each Gilbert and Sullivan opening night brought with it Gilbert and Sullivan acting out their personal rituals — the composer arriving to conduct, smiling, confident, joking; the play-

wright/director putting on finishing touches, becoming increasingly nervous, giving last minute instructions to the principals and finally running from the theatre as the overture began. Gilbert couldn't bear opening nights. Why do you think Gilbert could not stand to watch first performances? What do you think it was in his character that brought this about? Do you know anyone who reacts this way after working on a project over a long period of time (i.e not reading the final draft of a paper, not reading a newspaper after it is published, never viewing a videotape of a performance, etc.). Why do you think they behave this way?

9. One of the themes in *H.M.S. Pinafore* has to do with thinking someone is one thing when they are actually another, and basing our relationship with that person on what they aren't. How do we judge people — by their dress, their speech, their job? Do we change our judgement of people if they change their position or status?

10. Discuss class structure. Do you have any class structures within your school (cliques). Describe them. What brings them into being? Can a person move from one clique to another? Why or why not? How? How do you feel about class structure in your school? Discuss class structure in our society.

11. Discuss the concept of equality in our society. Does it really exist? If so, why does it exist? If not, how could it exist?

12. What is hypocrisy? Discuss situations in which people have reacted hypocritically. Examine famous people (politicians, performers) who you feel are hypocritical.

13. What is the first thing that attracts you to someone? Discuss the value of each of the qualities you value in a person.

14. Can love overcome the strictures of class, parental disapproval, and other obstacles? Why or why not?

Discussion questions for after reading *H.M.S. Pinafore*

Note : If your class will be seeing the Huntington production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, but will not be reading the play, these questions may be discussed after viewing the play.

1. Trace the plot parts of this play (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement).
2. What is believable in the plot of *H.M.S. Pinafore*? What is unbelievable? What is supposed to be taken seriously? What is being satirized? How can you tell?
3. How does this play combine satire and nonsense?
4. *H.M.S. Pinafore* was one of the first musical comedies in which the chorus was not merely a band of singers who came on whenever needed in dresses appropriate to the scene, but formed collectively an important character in the play. Critic Reginald Allen wrote in *The Standard* that "Every block and rope to the minutest detail is in place, in fact [the set] is an exact model of what it represents... Here we find that marvel of marvels, a chorus that acts, and adds to the reality of the illusion." Discuss this concept of realism in set and chorus of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. How does it work in the musical theatre today?
5. The contrived ending which reveals that Buttercup had switched two babies at birth has been viewed by some as destroying the plot of *Pinafore*. Do you agree? Things to consider: Little Buttercup nursed both babies (Ralph and Captain), yet in the action shown one is years younger than the other; Little Buttercup who switched the babies ends up matched with one of them when they are men. Wouldn't she be old enough to be his mother? Discuss this age discrepancy. Does it really matter when the play is one of caricature and exaggeration anyway?
6. What do Gilbert and Sullivan say and imply about class structure?
7. What are the implications of the notion that it is acceptable for Sir Joseph to marry Josephine, who is below his rank, but that she would not be allowed to marry below her rank?
8. How did one get ahead in the British Navy in the 19th century? By birth? By merit? How does this compare to society today? Have things changed?
9. Given the class structure of England 100 years ago, it has been said that Gilbert, in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, turned the idea of class structure topsy-turvy. For example, sailors were often the dregs of society, and so far beneath captains that Josephine would never have considered looking at Ralph, let alone fallen in love with him. Furthermore, a young, handsome sailor, such as Ralph, was rare. Discuss this topsy-turvy element of the play. Is verisimilitude important for a work like *H.M.S. Pinafore*, or do nonsense and delight make them irrelevant?
10. How critical is Gilbert of the class structure of England? Support your opinion. Things to consider: Ralph, who looks and sounds like a noble fellow, turns out in fact to be a noble fellow,

which paradoxically supports the linking of birth and class. How would *H.M.S. Pinafore* need to be changed to reflect American cultural attitudes?

11. Discuss the following themes and ideas: rank and privilege in character, love can level ranks, hypocrisy, physical attraction, equality. Use specific examples and quotes from the play (**Note:** these topics are also proposed in the curriculum section of discussion questions for before reading or viewing *H.M.S. Pinafore*).

12. Dick Deadeye says “When people have to obey other people’s orders, equality’s out of the question.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

13. What is the function of the character Dick Deadeye?

14. Compare *Pinafore* to any other operetta or musical comedy. Compare it to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Research Topics

Note : The proposed research topics may be explored in groups or individually, presented in written or verbal form with or without visual or audio aids.

Gilbert and Sullivan and Their Careers

1. Write a paper on the lives of the following: Sir William S. Gilbert, Sir Arthur Sullivan, Richard D'Oyly Carte.
2. What is the significance of Richard D'Oyle Carte and the Savoy Theatre in the careers of Gilbert and Sullivan?
3. Though we often think of Gilbert and Sullivan as one name, associated with delightful, satirical operettas, they were distinctly very different individuals. Sullivan was the more gentle and tender of the two, while Gilbert was highly idiosyncratic, bad-tempered, autocratic, and litigious. Theirs is a very interesting "odd couple" story. Research these two formidable, creative men, and then compare and contrast their personalities.
4. Likewise, research and write a paper on the different approaches each man had towards their work and methodology: the conception, writing/composing, rehearsal process, treatment of the professionals around them, the performances, etc.

Victorian England

1. Research Queen Victoria. Who was she? What kind of woman was she? What important historical and sociological changes was she instrumental in bringing about?
3. Look up the marriage customs of England during this period. Compare them to modern American marriage customs. Compare them to the customs of some other society.
4. Look up the organization and ranks of the British Navy.
5. England is frequently a difficult country to understand from the outside, because it manages at one and the same time to be an aristocracy and a democracy. Her citizens belong to rigidly divided social grades, and yet in practice can ignore class barriers and achieve a man-to-man equality not to be outdone anywhere. In Gilbert and Sullivan's time it was important for a man "to know his place." There were two codes in effect in England — a legal code, in which all that matters is that a man should be a man, and a social code, in which it is important that he should be a gentleman. Research the class structure of England during Victo-

rian times. Compare it to the class structure in England today. Compare them both to the class structure of the United States then and now.

6. Research the rising middle class in later Victorian England.
7. Look up the fashions of England during these Victorian years.
8. Research the acting style of Victorian England. Compare that acting style to the acting style of today.

Musical Theatre

1. Trace the development of musical theatre from the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan through the concept musicals of the present day.
2. Define the following musical theatre terms: libretto, overture, refrain, patter song, character song, narrative, ballad, stylized movement.
3. Write a paper on the careers of some of the important collaborators in musical theatre: Harrigan and Hart, Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Comden and Green, etc.
4. Compare some American operettas (*The Desert Song*, *Naughty Marietta*) with their British counterparts.

H.M.S. Pinafore

1. To what do the following refer: Jove, Elysian, Cimmerian?
2. Research the origin of the main ideas for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. From where did Gilbert glean his inspirations: people from real life in England, past works, ballads, other stories, etc.?
3. Gilbert is known to have taken pains to create a sense of fidelity of setting for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Every detail of the *Pinafore*'s rigging in its premiere production was correct. Research what a man-of-war looked like then, and how Gilbert went about researching this particular element of his story. Compare the Huntington set for *H.M.S. Pinafore* with that of the set in Gilbert's day.

Writing assignments

Note : Some of these writing assignments overlap with the preceding research and discussion questions and can be used in conjunction with them. Many of the discussion questions and research topics lend themselves to writing assignments.

1. Write a description of the organization of the British Navy.
2. Write a description of British society of the 19th century.
3. Compare marriage customs in the following eras : Victorian England, mid-century America, America today.
4. Write a library paper on the life of Gilbert, Sullivan, or D'Oyly Carte.
5. Write a paper arguing in favor of a class structure.
6. Write a paper arguing against class structure.
7. Write an essay on the theme of love in conflict with authority.
8. Write an essay on how we tend to judge others in terms of their language, dress, and social position.
9. Identify and analyze a major theme from *H.M.S. Pinafore*.
10. Write a story using 10-15 of the vocabulary words from the play.
11. Write a "mini-dictionary" of 10 slang terms from contemporary English that correspond to ten slang terms from *H.M.S. Pinafore* (words from the list like "jacky" and "tommy").
12. Analyze one of the major characters from *H.M.S. Pinafore*.
13. Compare and contrast any two characters from the play.
14. Compare and contrast Dick Deadeye with other villains from other plays, stories, novels, etc. with which you are familiar.
15. Write a short rap version of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, or of a scene from it.
16. Write a review of the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Activities

Verbal activities

1. Act out vocabulary words from *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Have each member of the class choose 3-5 words to introduce to the class by acting them out.
2. Divide the class into groups and have each group take a section of vocabulary words, look up the definitions, and present the findings to the rest of the class.
3. Debate the concept of class structure in England.
4. Debate the concept of class structure in general. Is it necessary for social and economic survival? Examine past and present societies.
5. Debate the concept that all men are equal.
6. Research the litigation that Gilbert brought against Sullivan and D'Oyly Carte. Take sides on the issue. Hold a mock trial with students playing Gilbert, Sullivan, D'Oyly Carte, lawyers, judge, etc.

Performing arts activities

1. Perform a scene from *H.M.S. Pinafore* in class.
2. Prepare a song from another Gilbert and Sullivan production.
3. Practice a Gilbert and Sullivan patter song.
4. Using Martyn Green's *Treasury of Gilbert and Sullivan* (Simon and Schuster, 1941), sing some of the more familiar songs from *H.M.S. Pinafore*.
5. Write a rap version of a scene from this play. Actually, patter songs have a lot in common with rap. This might be an area to explore.
6. Develop a concept to update *Pinafore*.

Background activities

1. Study the outstanding colored photographs in the Darlene Geis text, *The Gilbert and Sullivan Operas* (Abrams, 1983). Note the illustrations showing costumes, sets, hairstyles, etc. Which are appropriate for a Gilbert and Sullivan production today?
2. Construct a model of a man-of-war.
3. Find England and Portsmouth on a map.

Field Trips

1. Visit the *U.S.S. Constitution* in Charlestown. Notice the characteristics of a man-of-war.
2. Visit a maritime museum.
3. Attend another Gilbert and Sullivan production.

Other

1. Invite someone from a Gilbert and Sullivan Society (There are several around) to speak to your class.

Related Works

The following are some other works students might read and discuss. They are related to *H.M.S. Pinafore* through their genre, time, themes, characters, plot or setting.

Herman Melville: *Billy Budd*

Herman Melville: *Moby Dick*

George Bernard Shaw: *Pygmalion*

Lerner and Loewe: *My Fair Lady*

Henry Fielding: *Tom Jones*

William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*

William Shakespeare: *The Comedy of Errors*

Oscar Wilde: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Upstairs, Downstairs (On Video)

Sigmund Romberg (composer) and Otto Harbach
and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyricists): *The Desert Song* (Operetta)

Victor Herbert (composer) and Rida Johnson Young (lyricist):
Naughty Marietta (Operetta)

Other Gilbert works

Other Sullivan works

Other Gilbert and Sullivan works

Vocabulary

anomaly
antagonism
antithetical
appalled
armoury
asperity
audacious
celerity
condescension
consolation
conundrum
depraved
dictatorial
disparage
dissembled
fretful
frivolous
ganglion
ignobly
indignant
injudicious
insolent
irreconcilable
melancholy
minstrel
nauseate
oracular
patrician
presumptuous
prey
privation
quail
regent
reprobation
saucy
solecism
spurn
staunch
subjective
supercilious
tedious
treacle
utterance
wafted

Nautical Vocabulary from *H.M.S. Pinafore*

H.M.S.
bumboat
quarter-deck
man-of-war
boatswain
deadeye
yard arm
admiralty
poop deck
midshipman
bulwarks
topman
hornpipe
grog
tack
tar
cat-o-nine tails
epaulet
fo'c'sle
figurehead
marine
bow
prow

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(Contains 143 illustrations)
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